



FAX NEWS

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U.S.-sponsored medical attention program postponed

The Embassy of the United States regrets to announce the postponement of a two-week medical action planned for the cities of Caracollo, Toledo, and Machacamarca in the Department of Oruro during the period March 7 through March 16. The postponement was attributed to ongoing and foreseen circumstances in the area that threatened the security of patients and medical personnel, particularly when they try to travel to and from the clinics. A similar program was canceled for District 2 in El Alto in August 2004, also because protests made the situation too unstable and insecure for the proposed medical treatment.

The program of free medical attention in the Department of Oruro was scheduled to involve the cooperation of military and civilian doctors from the United States and Bolivia who were planning to provide vaccinations, pre-natal care, dental services, and eyeglasses to patients in these rural areas. The cities of Caracollo, Toledo, and Machacamarca had been specifically chosen because it was determined that these cities represented areas where local citizens might particularly benefit from additional medical services.

Approximately \$40,000 in medicines had been donated by the United States Military to support the medical teams. Items included antibiotics, antifungals, skin creams for sun damage, all of these treatments for problems endemic to the Department of Oruro. Although the medicine and equipment were already in Bolivia, the threat of road blockades prevented their being transported to the clinics where the free medical service was to be provided.

According to Lt.Col. Kevin McDonough, of the United State Military Group in Bolivia, this mission has been over 12 months in the planning and was a cooperative exercise between the United States military, the Bolivian military, and the Bolivian Ministry of Health. "I'm really disappointed because I have planned medical assistance exercises like this before, and I know how much good they can do for children who don't have all their vaccinations, for mothers and fathers worried about a child who's sick, for people who can finally have a pair of glasses that they really need. In the last one, we served over 700 people per day and estimate that 5,000 to 10,000 would have been served in the Oruro area. So every day lost means lots of people who will suffer needlessly."

Lt. Col. McDonough also noted that it takes considerable coordination to put together a mission of this type, and it will not be simple to reschedule. "We are always happy when we can put together a program like this that we know will really help the people of Bolivia, and we try to do as many of them as we can." Finally, Lt. Col. McDonough noted that canceling or postponing a medical mission may make it harder to get approval for the next mission. According to LT. COL. McDonough Bolivia is now scheduled for more MEDRETE's than any other country in South America, but there are many countries in the region asking for these kinds of missions. Reflecting on his experience with previous MEDRETE missions, Lt. Col. McDonough commented, "I love working with the Bolivian people, and I really hope that we can reschedule this one so that the needy people—the men, women, and especially the children—of Caracollo, Toledo, and Machacamarca can benefit from this free medical attention."